(b) Steps taken by the Government to increase the production of oilseeds and hence of edible oils in the country include enhanced incentives to the farmers through fixation of Minimum Support Price (MSP) of major oilseeds, implementation of Centrally Sponsored Integrated Scheme for Oilseeds, Pulses, Oil palm & Maize (ISOPOM) in certain states, financial assistance for Oil Palm Development, assistance provided for purchase of breeder seed, production of foundation seed, production and distribution of certified seeds, integrated pest management, etc. Availability and price situation of edible oils are monitored.

(c) and (d) In order to harmonise the interest of domestic oilseed growers, consumers and processors and to regulate imports of edible oils to the extent possible, the duty structure on edible oils is reviewed from time to time. Crude Palm oil and refined palm oil already attract customs duty of 80% and 90% respectively. Soyabean oil attracts custom duty of 45%.

Wheat Import

†614. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to import wheat, if so, what necessitated this import and the names of the countries from which wheat would be imported alongwith the quantum of wheat to be imported from each of these countries;

(b) whether the centre's recent claim of adequate reserves in the country proved to be imcorrect, if so, the reasons for making such claims; and

(c) the justification for such frequently changing statements by Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (DR. AKHILESH PRASAD SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir. The Government has decided to import 5 lakh tonnes of wheat through STC for which the latter has floated a tender to be opened on 20th February, 2006. The price and name of suppliers/

† Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

countries would be known only after finalisation of the tender. The reason and rationale behind importing the wheat *inter alia*, are reduced availability of wheat stocks in the central Pool, high ruling market prices, higher off take, lower procurement levels and to augment the domestic availability of wheat.

(b) and (c) The stocks of wheat in the Central pool as on 1.1.2006 was 61.88 lakh MTs as against the buffer norm of 82 lakh MTs. These stocks are sufficient to meet the requirement under PDS and welfare schemes until the next procurement season commencing in the 3rd week of March, 2006. Since the Government is firmly committed not to compromise in the matter of food security and also to keep a check on the open market prices of wheat, it has been decided to augment the domestic availability of wheat by import of 5 lakh MTs of wheat.

Import of Wheat

615. SHRI VARINDER SINGH BAJWA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to import wheat this year;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) the quantity to be imported, indicating the rates of import and the names of the countries from where wheat is to be imported;

(d) the present stocks of wheat in Government godowns; and

(e) the estimated domestic consumption of wheat during 2006-07?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (DR. AKHILESH PRASAD SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The Government has allowed State Trading Corporation to import 5 lakh MTs of wheat at the Southern ports only. The above decision was taken keeping in view the reduced wheat stocks in the central Pool, the need to keep a check on the open market prices of wheat as well as to augment the domestic availability of wheat as the Government is not to compromise in the matter of food security. The rates of import and the names of the countries would be known after finalization of the tender fliated for purchase of wheat by the State Trading Corporation.